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SUBJECT: SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA: AFGHANISTAN, NATO ROLE,
ANTI-TALIBAN OFFENSIVE; POPE'S STATEMENT ON MUSLINS; WESTERN
HEMISPHERE: US ACTIONS IN PARAGUAY; SAO PAULO

[1](#)1. "Relapse In Afghanistan"

Leading national circulation daily liberal Folha de S. Paulo

editorialized (9/18): "Compared with Iraq, Afghanistan is a kind of garden of delights. The US intervention was successful. The hated Taliban regime was deposed and replaced by a government that acquired legitimacy through democratic elections. Unfortunately there are signs that the situation is also deteriorating in Afghanistan.... The main reason to explain Taliban's regrowth is the weakness of Hamid Karzai's government, which even being supported by NATO troops has failed to impose its authority outside Kabul. The responsibility is largely attributed to Western nations, which did not deploy enough soldiers. Taliban is still not popular in the South, where it imposes itself by fear. The situation, however, may be changed especially if NATO continues acting with rigor in actions against the militias. Bombs missing the target have devastated the prestige of the Karzai government. If the US and its allies fail to correct the mistakes, they will run the risk of being involved in a quagmire not only in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan."

[1](#)2. "Mohammed's Sword"

Leading national circulation daily liberal Folha de S. Paulo (9/16) editorialized: "Like anyone else, the Pope has the right to say whatever he thinks. Likewise, Muslims who feel insulted by the pontiff's words have the right to question him. What is not acceptable is that a legitimate protest deteriorates into violence. In regards to the merit of the question, none of the parties seem to be exempt from any sin so as to be able to throw the first stone. Joseph Ratzinger's speech was not aimed at rousing the Arabs' anger, but rather at inviting Islam for an inter-religious dialogue. The paradox begins here. It's hard to believe that a public and experienced man like any pope should be has inadvertently used politically incorrect citations.... But it is unquestionable that Islam historically expanded itself using violence and obtained conversions by means of the scimitar's edge. Incidentally, this is a point that approximates Islam and Christianity, especially Catholicism.... This additional misunderstanding between the Catholics' leader and Muslim groups shows how much the inter-religious dialogue must evolve."

[1](#)3. "Another Battlefield"

Leading national circulation daily liberal Folha de S. Paulo's political columnist Eliane Cantanhede commented (9/17): "As a result of developments involving Hugo Chavez's Venezuela, Evo Morales' Bolivia and Nestor Kirchner's Argentina, Brazil has not paid sufficient attention to its backyard, i.e., its neighbor Paraguay. As a result, the US has not lost time and has already set a foot in Colombia and is stepping another one in Paraguay. The difference is that the Colombian base is military and justified by the fight against drug trafficking. The recently created base in Paraguay is

involved in civic and social actions and follows the Cuban occupation strategy: through medical doctors, dentists, vaccines and medicines. President Nicanor Duarte is not a fool. He shoots aiming at every direction, sometimes flirting, sometimes explicitly blackmailing. And he has succeeded in attracting the US attention, provoking Brazil and allying with Venezuela.... The same anti-imperialistic feeling shown by some Brazilian sectors regarding the US is disseminated in the Paraguayan society in regards to Brazil.... Brazil and Argentina have just agreed to create a cooperation fund aimed at developing Mercosul's minor partners - Paraguay and Uruguay - that can be seen as an effort to recover both nations from Uncle Sam's benevolent claws."

McMullen